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THE GERRILLA

PART I.

Methuen wriggled himself into a corner of the hut, rested his shoulder against the adobe wall and made himself as comfortable as the rawhide thongs with which he was tied up would permit. "Well, Calvert," said he, "I hope you quite realize what an extremely ugly hole we're in."

"I don't think you can see the pair of us before sunset," I replied, "and that's a certainty. My only wonder is we haven't been strung up before this."

"You think a rope and a tree's a certainty, do you? I wish I could comfort myself with that idea. I wouldn't mind a simple gentlemanly dose of hanging. But there are more things in heaven and earth, Calvert—"

"He broke off and whistled drowsily."

"I moistened my dry, cracked lips, and asked him huskily what he meant."

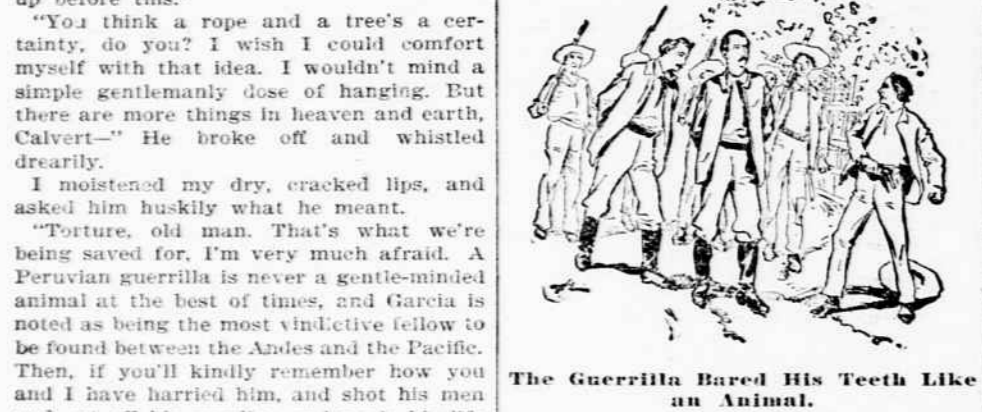
"Torture, old man. That's what we're being saved for. I'm very much afraid. A Peruvian guerrilla is never a gentle-minded animal at the best of times, and Garcia is noted as being the most vindictive fellow to be found between the Andes and the Pacific. Then, if you'll kindly remember how you and I have harried him, and shot his men and cut off his supplies, and made his life a torment and a thing of terrors for the past four weeks, you'll see he had got a big bill against us. If he'd hated us less, he'd have had us shot on sight when we were caught; as it is, I'm afraid he felt that a couple of bullets in hot blood wouldn't pay off the score."

"If he thinks the matter over calmly, he will very soon see that if he whips us out there'll be reprisals to be looked for."

"And a great lot," replied Methuen, grimly. "He'll care for the dance of those. If we are put out of the way, he knows quite well that there are no two other men in the Chilean service who can keep him on the 'not as we have done. No, sir. We can't scare Garcia with that yarn. You think that because we're still alive, there's hope. Well, I'm afraid I fail in my own theory for this; if any one offered me a shot through the head now, I'd accept it and risk the chance."

"You take the 'flood' now, now the man's face is not altogether cruel. There's humor in it."

"Then perhaps he'll show his funniness when he takes it out of us," Methuen replied.



used all the harshness of war. Had we been Chileans in the Chilean service, this might have been pardonable. But we were aliens from across the sea, were fresh-boiled, fighting not for a country, but each for his own hand; and as such we were beyond the pale of military courtesy. He had earned a punishment. Had we any word to speak why this should not be given?

Garcia looked toward us expectantly, and then set himself to roll a fresh cigarette.

PART II.

I shrugged my shoulders. It seemed useless to say anything. Methuen said: "Look here, sir, you've got us, there's no mistake about that. It seems to me you've two courses before you, and they are these: Either you can kill us, more or less barbarously, in which case you will raise a most pestilential hunt at your heels, or you can put us up to ransom. Now, neither of these, nor myself is a rich man, but if you choose to let us go with sound skins, we're prepared to pay ten thousand Chilean dollars apiece for our passports. Now, how does that strike you?"

Garcia finished rolling his cigarette, and lit it with care. He inhaled a deep breath of smoke. "Senior," he said (the words coming out from between his white teeth with little puffs of vapor) "you do not appear to understand. You fight as a soldier of fortune, and I am merely in arms as a patriot. I can cut with a bullet the lives for money, nor am I a timorous fool to be scared into robbing a culprit of his just dues."

"Very well, then," said Methuen, "murder the pair of us."

Garcia smiled unpleasantly. "You may be very brave," said he, "but you are not a judicious one. To a judge less just than myself this insolence might have added something to your punishment; but as it is I shall overlook what you have said, and only impose the penalty I had determined upon before you spoke."

He lifted his thin, yellow fingers, and drew a fresh breath of smoke. Then he waved the cigarette toward the magnolia tree in the center of the plaza. "You see that lough white tree toward the chapel?"

"It's made for a gallows," said Methuen. "Precisely," said the guerrilla, "and it will be used as one inside of ten minutes. I shall string one of you to the top of the neck to dangle there between heaven and earth. The other man shall have a rifle thrust through his back, and he shall hang there, and if, standing where he does now, he can cut with a bullet the rope with which his friend is hanged, then you shall both go free."

"I hear you say," said Methuen, "in other words, you condemn one of us to be strangled slowly without chance of reprieve. But what guarantee have we



the Earless Man swung into the hut, tortured. "Remember that punishment in the Mikado! That had 'something humorous' in it. I don't say that. But the rawhide ropes cut deeper into my wrists and limbs. I had no great dread of being killed in the ordinary way, or I should not have entered the Chilean army in the middle of a hot war, and I was prepared to risk the ordinary wounds of action in return for the excitement of the fight. But to be caught, and held a helpless prisoner, and be deliberately tortured to death by every cruelty this malignant devil Garcia could devise, was a possibility I had not counted on before. In fact, as the Peruvians had repeatedly given out that they would offer no quarter to us English in the Chilean service, had all us naturally resolved to die fighting rather than be taken. And indeed this desperate feeling paid very well, since on two separate occasions when Methuen and myself had been taken, each time so close that we were taken, we broke through and escaped. But one thinks nothing of the chances of death and maiming at such a time. There is a glow within one's ribs which scares away all trace of fear."

"I suppose there's no chance of rescue?" I said.

"None whatever," said Methuen. With a little sigh. "Think it over, Calvert. We stand out from the hacienda with an escort of five men, and we're ordered to ride away to enjoy a ten-days' leave in the mountains. The troops are left to recruit; within twelve hours of our leaving them Garcia cleverly ambushes us in a canyon where not three people pass in a year. The poor beggars who form our escorts are all gastados."

"Yes, but are you sure of that?" I interrupted. "I saw them all drop off their horses when we were fired upon. But that doesn't prove they were dead. Some might have been merely wounded, and when the rear began to our post with the news. Still, I own it's a small chance."

"And you may divest yourself of even that thin ray of hope. Whilst you were being strung senseless across a horse, I saw that man without the ears go around with a machete and—well, when the brute had done there was no doubt that the poor fellows being as dead as lumps of mud. Ah, and talk of the devil!"

"The man's name swung into the hut."

"Buenos, señores," said he, "manfully. 'You will have the honor now of being tried, and I'm sure I hope you will be pleased with the result.'"

"I suppose we can find that out later," said Methuen, with a yawn, "but, anyway, I don't think much of your hospitality. A had today would be a very bad day, even a nip of aguardiente would be better than nothing."

"I might be a waste of good liquor," he said, "but you must ask Garcia. He will see to your needs."

A guard of twelve ragged fellows, armed with carbines and machetes, had followed the earless man into the hut, and two of them, whilst he talked, had removed the seizures from our knees and ankles. They helped us to our feet, and we walked with them into the dazzling sunshine outside.

"I'll trouble some of you for my hat," said Methuen, when the glare first blazed down on him; and then, as no one took any notice of the request, he turned against the earless man with a sudden nerve, and knocked his sombrero on to the ground. "I'll trouble you for my hat," said he; "it's better than nothing at all. Pick up the thing and put it on my head."

The guerrilla bared his teeth like an animal and drew a pistol. I thought he would have shot my comrade out of hand, and expected that that would be the end of the matter. In fact, he only looked at Methuen and expected the man to that end. But either because the nearness of Garcia and fear of his disapproval stayed him, or through thought of a finer vengeance which was to come, the earless man contented himself by dealing a battery of kicks, and bidding our guards to go on more carefully.

In this way, then, we walked along a path between two fields of vine, and passed down the straggling street of the village, which the guerrillas had occupied, and brought up in a little plaza which faced the white-walled chapel. In the turret a bell was tolling dolefully in slow strokes, and as the sound came to me through the heated air, it did not require much imagination to frame it into an amen. In the center of the plaza was a vast magnolia tree filled with several wax-like flowers and splashed with cones of coral-pink.

We drew up before the plaza of the principal house. Seated under its shade in



Garcia sprang to his feet. He that you will not slit the second man's throat after you have had your sport out of him?"

Garcia sprang to his feet with a stamp of passion, and the chair rolled over backward. "You foul adventurer," he cried, "you paid mankiller!" and then he broke off with a bitter "Pah!" and folded his arms. His tongue in hand again, he said, coldly, "my country's wrongs may break my heart, but they can never make me break an honest man's. I am a guerrilla, but I still remain a gentleman."

"I beg your pardon," said Methuen. "We will now," continued Garcia, "find out which of you two will play with me. Afterwards I will add another condition which may lend more skill to what follows. Choose between yourselves which of you will hang, and which shoot."

My comrade shrugged his shoulders. "I like you, Calvert," he said, "and I'm not prepared to dance on nothing for you."

"It would be simplest to toss for it," I said.

"Precisely; but, my dear fellow, I have both hands trussed up, and no coin."

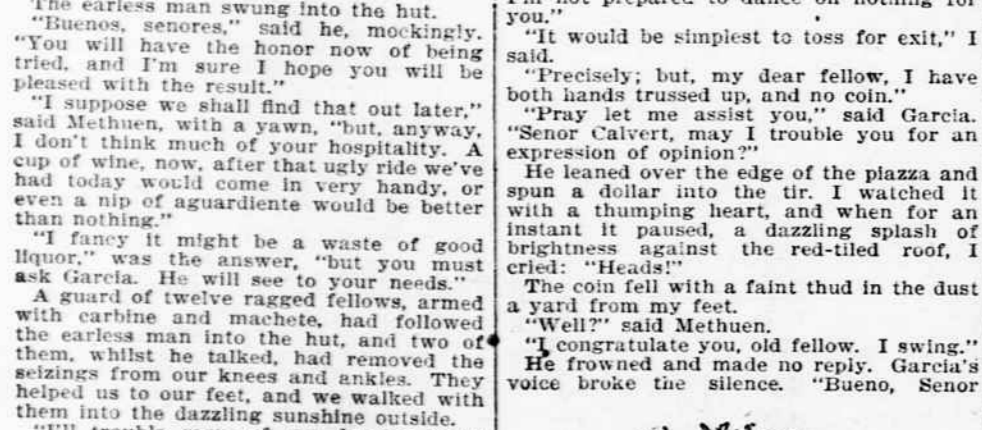
"Pray let me assist you," said Garcia. "Senior Calvert, I trouble you for an expression of opinion."

He leaned over the edge of the piazza and spun a dollar into the air. I watched it whirling, humming, and when for an instant it paused, a dazzling splash of brightness against the red-tiled roof, I up beside him.

The coin fell with a faint thud in the dust a yard from my feet.

"Well," said Methuen. "I congratulate you, old fellow. I swing."

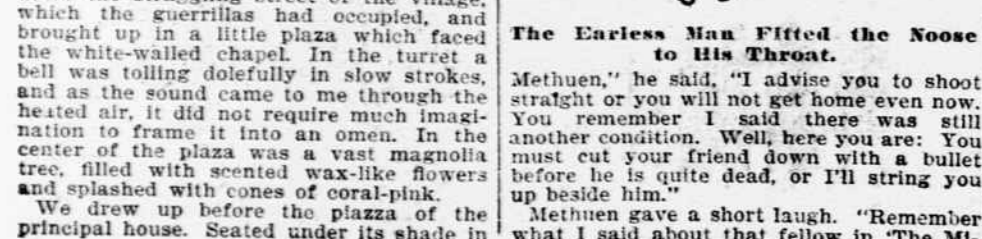
He frowned and made no reply. Garcia's voice broke the silence. "Bueno, Senior



The Earless Man Fitted the Noose to His Throat.

Methuen, he said, "I advise you to shoot straight or you will not get home even now. I remember I said there was still another condition. Well, here you are: You must cut your friend down with a bullet before he is quite dead, or I'll string you up beside him."

Methuen gave a short laugh. "Remember what I said about that fellow in 'The Mi-



kado, Calvert? You see where the humor comes in? We've been that cold, but for nothing. You and I must change positions."

"Not at all. I take what I've earned."

"But say yes. I take this. I took it that the man who was hanging stood a delicate chance anyway, and I didn't feel generous enough to risk it. But now that the senior here has put me in an extra clause, the situation is changed altogether. You aren't a brilliant shot, old fellow, but you may be able to cut me down with a bullet if you remember your own firing form, and shoot extra straight. But it's a certain thing that I couldn't do it if I had my fingers to my nose. The utmost I could manage would be to make a bell in your worthy self. So you see I must wear the belt, and you must apply your shoulder to the rifle butt—"

"In English," "Grin, and say something funny, or these brutes will think we cared for them."

But I was incapable of further speech. I could have gaped at the prospect of being hanged myself, but the horror of this other naked turned me sick and dumb. And at that moment I had a strong desire to cry: "There was a well on one side of the plaza and the earless man went and robbed the windlass of its rope. With clumsy landman's fingers he forced a noose, took it to the great magnolia tree and threw the noose over the projecting branch. The bell of the little chapel rang on tolling to the grave, and they marched up to his fate over the sun-baked dust. They passed a throng around his ankles; the earless man lifted his head and looked at a dozen of the guerrillas, with shouts of laughter, laid hold of the hauling part of the line, and then a voice from behind fell upon my ear. Garcia was forcing a noose, took it to the great magnolia tree and threw the noose over the projecting branch. 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